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ABSTRACT

This paper presents some preliminary data on rape and older women as a means for informing the interested in gathering data in their own geographic and/or socio-economic areas. Utilizing data from the 1970 census in Los Angeles, the author attempts to paint a broad-brush picture of this situation in a large metropolitan city. In addition, he hopes to raise some questions concerning this particular crime and age group, questions which need answers and for which he seeks the reader's assistance and reflection. (Author/VG)

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RAPE AND THE ELDERLY:

AN INITIAL ANALYSIS

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PAUL A. KERSCHNER

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RAPE AND THE ELDERLY:
AN INITIAL ANALYSIS

The paper I am presenting this morning focuses upon an issue which has received precious little attention by either research scientists or gerontological practitioners. One is hard-pressed to discover whether the subject matter, rape of older women, is too reprehensible to receive attention, or whether the relatively low percentage accounts for the lack of adequate data. For the first time last year, a national agency, NIMH submitted a plan for the receipt of research proposals dealing with rape, with the elderly victim involved as one of the sample groups.

Due to major changes in the funding cycle, NIMH has not yet allocated the funds to any institution for this particular project. It was decided, therefore, that today's presentation would present some preliminary data on rape and older women as a means for informing those individuals in the audience who wish to gather data in their own geographic and/or socio-economic area. I will be speaking specifically about the City of Los Angeles and utilizing data from the 1970 census. I am not suggesting that these data are complete or unflawed, rather they are intended to paint a broad brush picture of this situation in a large metropolitan city. In addition, it will raise some rather curious questions concerning this particular crime and age group, questions which need answering and for which I seek your assistance and reflection.

Allow me to begin with some general statistics from the LEAA's national crime survey.

1. Rape is the fastest growing of the nation's violent crimes.

   a. Nationally it increased 9% during 1974.

   b. Increased 165% from 1960-1974.

   c. There were 55,000 rapes reported in 1974.

      1. 51 out of every 100,000 adult women were raped in 1974.

   d. Rape appears to be among the highest of the non-reported crimes, thus statistics on its incidence may represent a gross underestimate of its real frequency.

2. Most rapes occur indoors and in, or just outside, the victim's or attacker's home.

3. A majority of rapes are premeditated, the attacker often knows or has seen the victim before.

4. Rapes are most frequent on weekends and between 8 p.m. and 2 a.m.

5. Rape incidence is higher in lower socio-economic areas and where women live alone.

If we move the discussion to the City of Los Angeles, and begin to focus on the aged, some interesting data is generated.

1. Los Angeles has 500,000 individuals over the age of 65.

2. 35,000 of the elderly are black.

3. 20,000 are black women (of particular significance) -- about two-thirds.

In 1970 in the City of Los Angeles, there were 213 recorded rapes of women over the age of 65. This compares to 591 between

the ages of 12 and 19, 499 between the ages of 20-34, 197 between the ages of 35-49, and 194 between the ages of 50-64.

In terms of victimization of the over 65 group, the rate is one woman raped for every 2,500 women. This compares to 3 per 2,500 for the age group 20-34.

If one breaks the data down into three admittedly raw categories, white, black, and other, some interesting facts appear. In 1970 in Los Angeles City, there were:

1. .000 rapes per 100 within the white 65+ age group.
2. .000 rapes per 100 within the other 65+ age group.
3. 1.024 rapes per 100 within the black 65+ age group.

Translating these percentages into actual numbers, you come up with a figure of 200 rapes per 20,000 black elderly women (which is the number of black elderly women in Los Angeles). This figure of 200 nearly approximates the figure of 213 total rapes of elderly women. Thus, it appears that one or several actions are taking place here:

1. Only black elderly women are being raped in significant numbers.
2. Only black elderly women are reporting.
3. Rape of elderly is limited to certain geo/socio-economic areas.
4. White elderly women are better protected.
5. Data does not exist on "other" designation.

If you further break down the data and, in addition, to age and race, you add the variable of included theft or non-theft, the situation continues to grow in complexity.

In 1970 in Los Angeles City, the incidence of rape with theft for the 12-19 age was 293, without theft 298. For the 20-34 age 0 with theft; 499 without theft. For the 35-49 age 0 with theft; 197 without theft. For the 50-64 age 96 with theft; 98 without theft. For the 65+ age group 109 with theft; 104 without theft. It is clear that with the exception of teen rape, younger women are being raped without accompanying theft, while the later age bracket rapes bring with them an increased theft proportion.

This contrast with the younger population is further demonstrated if the variables of stranger and acquaintance are added. In 1970 in Los Angeles City, the trend was young women were being raped by acquaintances while older women by strangers. Again, teenage statistics are the exception.

	Age	Stranger	Acquaintance
1.	12-15	.106	.54
2.	16-19	.53	.110
3.	20-34	.025	.051
4.	35-49	.43	.000
5.	50-64	.24	.24
6.	65+	.040	.000

If you begin to correlate these variables, a trend appears to be present. Black elderly have a higher theft rate accompanying rape than do white elderly women. Black females have a higher rape by stranger rate than do white women.

In summary, this very preliminary look at rape data and the elderly reveals the following:

1. 213 rapes of elderly in 1970 in Los Angeles City.
2. The overwhelming percentage (99+%) of the reported rapes of elderly women in 1974 in Los Angeles City were of black women.
3. The older you are, the more likely the rape will be accompanied by theft.
4. The older you are, the more likely you will be raped by a stranger rather than acquaintance.
5. The above also correlates by race of the victim.

Crimes of physical violence are more dangerous and costly to elderly victims than to younger ones because of the increased physical vulnerability and the reduced financial capacity to absorb monetary losses on the part of older victims.

Comparing an old victim to a younger one, where both have suffered the same amount of physical injury, the older victim has a higher probability of dying, is hospitalized 2½ times as long on the average, and requires more expensive medical care during recovery.